

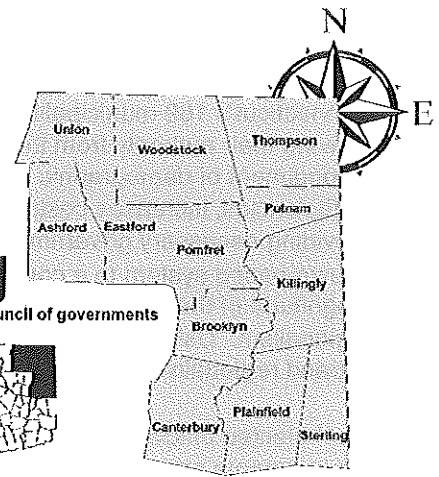
Testimony Regarding

House Bill 5780

AN ACT CONCERNING INTER-LOCAL AGREEMENTS

neccog

northeastern connecticut council of governments



The Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) **strongly supports** House Bill 5780 and urges the Committee to give it favorable consideration.

The Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) is a voluntary statutorily authorized association of local chief-elected officials of twelve municipalities, in northeastern Connecticut. The members towns are: **Ashford, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Killingly, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Sterling, Thompson, Union, and Woodstock.** NECCOG is not another level of government. It is a continuing association of local governments without legislative or taxing power. We are strongly committed to regionalism and are engaged in it on number of fronts, including:

- Paramedic Intercept
- Revaluation
- Economic Development
- Animal Services
- GIS
- Engineering
- Transit Administration
- Land Use Assistance
- Administrative Services

NECCOG has also regionally addressed a number of critical issues including: Tribal Recognition, Special Education, and Solid Waste Management. Currently, we are examining the possibility of regionalizing fire marshal duties, building officials duties, and land use enforcement. Our basic test on any of these is (1) does it save money and (2) does it increase efficiencies/service for residents.

NECCOG almost never uses 7-148cc in its regional services. The exception to this is our recently completed Regional Revaluation Program where we were mandated to use 7-148. Our normal approach is a relatively simple services agreement between each town and NECCOG. To date, this approach has worked well.

The use of regionalism to address many of Connecticut's immediate and long term budget challenges offers significant opportunity. The proper use of regionalism to address a range of needs now provided by 169 towns and various state agencies will lead to lasting efficiencies in the delivery of services and improvement of the quality of such services. The reduction in costs will contribute significantly to the reduction of the state deficit and lead to better spending decisions in the future. Several regions, including NECCOG, have successful records demonstrating such results.

Unlike most of the nation, Connecticut operates without county government. Our state has never had a functioning county system -- formally eliminating the counties in the 1960s. County boundaries function only as a connection to the rest of the country; primarily related to Census data.

Connecticut's 169 municipalities operate as independent entities under the state's constitution -- deriving their authority from the state. For many, this "home rule" approach to governance is the embodiment of democratic ideals. For others the home rule system is a relic that breeds inefficiencies, increases costs, and makes little sense for present times and the challenges of providing necessary government services with scarce resources. While the prospect of changing from a town-based system to a county-based or metropolitan-based government is remote - the magnitude of the current economic conditions provides a real opportunity for the use and success of regionalism. Using our existing Councils of Governments provides a ready vehicle to implement and expand regionalism.

Chief-elected officials, of course, are directly accountable to their residents. Councils of Governments are governed by chief-elected officials - serving as effective forums for chief-elected officials to discuss issues and seek collective solutions. This is a key reason why NECCOG and other COG's have realized success working cooperatively/regionally.

The membership of NECCOG knows that regionalism works. House Bill 5780 (as well as HB 6274) seeks to enhance regionalism and inter-municipal cooperation and we support its passage.

Thank you.

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